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"Tell Him I Loathe Him."

CHAPTER XXXVI. A FRESH MYSTERY.

INTO the long hall she passed, filled with row after row, of white-draped cots containing suffering forms and ghastly faces, each lifted with an attempted smile as she passed.

She paused at last beside a cot, the last in the row, and placed her cool hand upon the fevered forehead of a grizzled warrior who had fought his last battle, and was surrendering to the universal victor—Death.

"You are feeling better?" she exclaimed gently. "I am so glad; your fever is not nearly so high."

"But it is all over, just the same!" he answered grimly. "That German devil's bullet has done the work. Well, I don't regret it. There was little to live for. But—his hot face flushing as he lifted himself eagerly—"I want to see Colonel Childes. I fought beside him yesterday, and I want to grasp his hand before I die. I have never seen such fearless courage, such daring bravery. They tell me they have rewarded him with the Cross of the Legion of Honor, besides the title. It is well! it is well! They say he is here; may I not see him, sister?"

Miss Beaufort's eyes filled with tears, tears of joy and pride. She turned to Colonel Childes and took him by the hand.

"He is here," she said gently. "Your words of commendation must have been more pleasing to him even than the recognition of France."

She stepped back, leaving Colonel Childes to take her place.

"Won't you let me shake hands with you, sir?" asked the dying man. "I was not a coward, for the ball is in my chest, not my back; but you deserve all the credit France can give you, and more, more! You are a true

soldier, a noble man. We lost the battle, but defeat would have been a thousand times worse but for you."

"Your words touched my heart more closely than any I have heard, for if I am not mistaken you are a country man of mine. You are an American, are you not?"

"I am, thank God. And I bear your name as well. I am Eldridge Appleton Childes."

Erle started! He grew even a shade paler, his hand grasping that of the wounded man with a force of which he was unaware.

"Not the brother of Rathburn Childes?" he gasped.

"The same."

"He was my father?"

"Your father?"

"Yes, I am Erle Devereux Childes. But—I don't understand! You were supposed to have died and left me a large fortune."

"I never had one to leave anybody, my boy."

"Did you ever know a man there called Meredith Lansing?"

"Oh, yes, I had a small mine next to his, but he struck it rich and I didn't. He went back to America and I went to Honduras to try silver mining. I never heard of him afterward. What does it all mean, my boy?"

Erle Childes lifted his head. The strained eyes burned like coal in the white face. A cold dew stood from brow and mouth. His hand trembled as he lifted the damp hair from his forehead.

"My God!" he cried hoarsely. "If I only knew!"

CHAPTER XXVII. The Mystery Deepens.

Childes, with Meredith Lansing and Charlie Quintard, had rented a handsome suite of rooms near the Boulevard Malesherbes, and lived there with his friends in perfect unity and accord, enjoying the few hours that France left them free in spite of the troubles of the heart which distressed each one of the three in separate ways.

At the time of Childes' visit to the hospital, Meredith Lansing had gone for one of those strolls that had always been his custom, and Charlie Quintard sat alone in one of the elegant rooms, indulging in a pipe.

That his reflections were not of the pleasantest might easily have been seen from the expression of his thoughtful face; but whatever they might have been they were interrupted by a violent peal of the bell.

It was soon followed by a heavy knock upon the door, and a girl, stepping by the astonished valet, rushed into the room.

From the sweet, ingenious childishness of her face she might have been twelve years of age; but the diminished length of her costume indicated something like seventeen years.

"Oh, sir," she cried in English, charmingly touched with a French ac-

cent, you are Colonel Childes. I am sure. My father is dead, killed by one of those dreadful Prussians, and I have not a friend in the world to whom I can go for assistance.

"My father told me as he was dying that I should come to you, because you were great and good and brave, and that, perhaps, after peace had been declared, you would help me to go to America, where my dear mother's father lives. But it is not only in getting to America that I want you to help me. I am all alone and friendless.

"My father would never allow me to know people, and now there is no one—no one at all to take care of me, and I am afraid even of dear Paris in the hands of those dreadful men. You will help me—I know you will! You look so big, so noble, and brave and true! I know that you will not send a poor, helpless girl back to those wretches who would kill her.

"Oh, sir, tell me that I may stay. Those horrible men at the place where my father died would kill me. I should pitch myself into the Seine before I would go back to them again! Oh, sir, tell me that you will protect me!"

She paused at last, breathless from her long, eager speech, her lips quivering, her great, magnificent dark eyes lifted to his with a piteous pleading that touched him to the soul even before he had recovered his composure. When she had ceased, he took her hand and placed her gently, respectfully, in a chair.

"My poor child," he said softly, "you must not distress yourself like this. Why, you are trembling like a frightened fawn. There! you are perfectly safe here, you may take my word for that, though I have not the honor of being Colonel Childes."

"You are not—"

"Now don't get frightened. It is quite the same thing, in a certain way. Colonel Childes lives here, and is my most intimate friend, therefore you need not fear to trust yourself to me."

"Then you will not send me away?"

"Certainly not."

To Quintard's amazement the impulsive child seized his hand and covered it with kisses. It was almost with her tears when she released it.

"You are so good!" she cried. "I thank you so much! I—I—I don't know what to say, but I know my father, who is looking down from heaven upon his orphan child, is grateful to you, too. Let me tell you all about it."

"Not now," interrupted Quintard kindly. "You are agitated, nervous. Wait until Colonel Childes comes, and you may tell us together. Have you had your luncheon?"

"Nothing since yesterday."

"Great heavens! Here, Francois, bring a good luncheon as quickly as possible, and be sure there is plenty of it."

The girl smiled.

"I don't feel hungry. I think I had forgotten it until you mentioned it. Are you quite sure that Colonel Childes will not send me away when he comes?"

"Quite sure. He is one of the best fellows alive."

"Ah! he cannot be as good as you thought my father said he was noble and brave. My father was never mistaken."

"You loved him?"

"So much! It was because of me that he was killed. One of those dreadful men carried me away. My father followed. They shot him. They allowed me to be with him when he was dying, and that was when he told me what to do. Oh, it was horrible, horrible!"

A shudder passed over her.

"Don't let us speak of it now," said

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Quintard, affecting cheerfulness. "Tell me—what is your name?"

"Mignon Moreau. It is pretty, don't you think?"

"Very."

"My father thought so. He was so good to me!"

"Did he teach you English?"

"Yes, and Spanish and German. If I should not find my grandfather, I can make money in America to repay Colonel Childes for what I cost him. For I have no money now. You don't think he will mind that, do you? I am sure I could make money in America, for I know a great deal."

"Do you?" exclaimed Quintard, laughing at her ingenuously. "I suppose you will begin at once on your teaching me to speak German?"

"Don't you speak it?"

"No."

"And you will really let me teach you?"

"With all the pleasure in life."

"Perhaps you would like to learn modern Greek also?"

"Do you understand that?"

"I know a great many languages. My father said I knew them almost intuitively. When shall I begin to teach you?"

"As soon as I can get the books."

"Books! I don't know anything about books. What do you want with them?"

"Don't you teach from them?"

"No. I never read a book in my life."

"What?"

"I can't read."

"Not even in your own language?"

"No. No one ever taught me. I should like to learn to write, though."

"And can't you?"

"No. My father never taught me."

"Did you ever go to school?"

"Of course not. My father and I always traveled, everywhere—everywhere! We were never still. We remained in a country until we grew tired of it, and then we would go to another. I begged him so often to take me to America, but he never would. I want to learn to read writing, because there are some papers that he gave me when he had kept for me ever since I was a tiny baby. He told me to learn to write and to read them myself. He said it would not take me long, because I learn so quickly."

"Then I shall teach you, if you will let me, while you teach me German and Greek."

"How delightful. You have not told me your name yet, you know."

To be continued.

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